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TAGS: PREL PGOV ENRG

SUBJECT: GEORGIA-RUSSIA: EXPECT SHARP RUSSIAN REACTION TO GEORGIAN DEMAND TO WITHDRAW PKF

REF: BRYZA/BURNS E-MAIL OF FEBRUARY 14

Classified By: A/DCM Kirk Augustine. Reason 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In the absence of DFM Karasin from Moscow, A/DCM spoke with MFA 4th CIS Department Director Andrey Kelin to emphasize the efforts the USG has been making to moderate Georgian parliamentary action on CIS peacekeepers in South Ossetia (per ref e-mail request). Kelin took careful note of the information, said the GOR was receiving "different versions" of what action the Georgian parliament would take on February 15, and would follow developments closely. He added that the Georgians had been clearly warned about the negative consequences of "provocative" actions. In a separate conversation earlier on February 14, MFA Georgia Office Director Grigoryev stressed to poloff that the Russians would likely come out with a strongly negative reaction to what they expect to be in the resolution. The planned February 27-28 visit of PM Noghaideli would be in jeopardy. We stressed that the U.S. has been working hard with the Georgians to give the GOG maximum flexibility. Grigoryev asked whether the Georgians had any ideas for moving forward beyond the resolution. If the Russians themselves have any ideas, neither Kelin nor Kelin shared them. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) A/DCM spoke late on February 14 with 4th CIS Department Director Kelin, informing him of the efforts Ambassador Tefft had been making in Tbilisi to moderate Georgian actions. He noted in particular (per ref e-mail) that Amb. Tefft had been pushing for the resolution to give the government time and to tie any decision to the South Ossetian peace plan, to make a statement on the non-use of force, to make a statement on the need to reconcile the Georgian and Kokoity's peace plans, and to undertake unilateral steps on demilitarization. A/DCM added that Amb. Tefft had been told February 14 that the resolution would not call for the immediate removal of the CIS peacekeepers and would give the Georgian government time to find a resolution to the problem. A/DCM urged that the GOR avoid over-reactions to whatever parliamentary action is taken.

¶3. (C) Kelin expressed appreciation for the U.S. efforts, which he carefully noted. He said the GOR would await developments in the parliament and especially the reaction of the Georgian government. He noted that he had recently returned from Tbilisi, where he had clearly warned his Georgian interlocutors about the potential consequences of any rash or "provocative" actions. The GOR was receiving "different versions" from Georgian political figures about the likely actions of the parliament and government, and it could not confirm that no call would be made for the immediate removal of CIS peacekeepers from South Ossetia.

¶4. (C) In a separate meeting earlier on February 14 (prior to the receipt of ref e-mail), a gloomy MFA Georgia Office Director Grigoryev told poloff that the Georgian

parliamentary resolution would surely pass February 15. "Then what?" he asked. "Do the Georgians have a plan beyond the resolution? What do they expect to happen, even if the deadline is extended a month?" Poloff briefed him on U.S. efforts with the Georgians to ensure that parliamentary action give maximum flexibility to the GOG. We noted that we had pressed the Georgians on ideas discussed by DAS Bryza and Russian envoy Kenyaikin in Brussels February 6, including statements on the non-use of force, work on demilitarization, and progress on a workplan on which both the Georgians and South Ossetians can take ownership. We said Ambassador Tefft and other Western Ambassadors had met with DefMin Okruashvili and later with President Saakashvili on those issues. We noted that the Georgians had been asking for some sign of progress to show that this "frozen conflict" was not, in fact, frozen.

¶ 15. (C) Asked about the likely GOR reaction to the expected February 15 Georgian parliamentary action, Grigoryev stressed that "it would not be positive." He said Georgian State Minister Khaindrava had asked to visit Moscow February 16 and would meet with DFM Karasin. The JCC in Vienna was expected to go ahead February 21. However, the planned visit of PM Noghaideli to Moscow on February 27-28 might be in jeopardy, though the MFA would recommend that it go ahead as planned. There were "certain forces in Moscow," he noted, who wanted Russia to "slam the door" and stop all talks with the Georgians. The MFA would resist those forces, though their influence might at least limit the agenda for Noghaideli's visit.

¶ 16. (C) Grigoryev said that recent statements by Georgian President Saakashvili had "been the last straw" in poisoning the atmosphere between Russia and Georgia. Asked about the

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exchange of insults between Alksnis and Khaindrava, Grigoryev said he had no devotion to Alksnis, and Khaindrava's statements were clearly directed at the segment of Russian opinion that Alksnis represented. Asked about the implication in FonMin Lavrov's oral message to Secretary Rice that the Georgians were responsible for the January explosions in the Russian gas and electricity lines feeding Georgia, Grigoryev noted only that it was a closed message and not meant for the Georgians. Poloff urged that the Russians be restrained in all their public statements. Grigoryev reiterated that the Russian government had tried to be restrained in the last few days, but he expected the Georgian parliamentary action of February 15 would only worsen the atmosphere.

¶ 17. (C) Comment. All that the Russians appear able to see in the Georgian Parliament's expected action, it appears, is the latest in what they regard as a series of Georgian insults to Russia, and they are prepared for the worst. If the resolution comes out better than they expect, they will be pleasantly surprised, but it will probably be up to the Georgians -- starting with Khaindrava on February 16 -- to re-focus the GOR on concrete issues, rather than on resentment for perceived past wrongs. If the GOR has any concrete plans to turn the situation in a positive direction, neither Kelin nor Grigoryev hinted at their existence.

BURNS